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ABSTRACT

This study examines the changing role of bilingual education in a Title I elementary school in Northern California in the wake of the passage of Proposition 227. It is found that native language literacy is an important component in the academic success of English language learners and that reading in the native language does not detract form from learning to read in English but in fact supports the development of English reading skills. It was found that while it was difficult to establish an exact formula for success in bilingual education, several factors were found to contribute to such success including high expectations for language minority students, strong English language development programs, and program support at all levels. The author of this study, a teacher researcher, kept a daily journal of the effect the administrative decisions had on a day-to-day basis on instruction, daily practice, and student placement decisions. (Contains 16 references.) (KFT)

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The New Face of Bilingual Education: Is it Worth the Battle?

One School's Struggle

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May 2001

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Abstract

This study examined the changing role of bilingual education in a Title I elementary school in Northern California. The review of the literature revealed that there is a lot of misinterpretation and confusion about the role of native language use in academic settings. There are no detailed, undisputed guidelines for effective program models in bilingual education but there are some overarching themes and characteristics found across the board in successful programs. Above all, it is found that native language literacy is an important determining factor in the academic success of English Language Learners (ELL's) and that reading in the native language does not detract from learning to read in English but actually supports the development of English reading skills. Meta-analyses revealed that although it is difficult to establish an exact formula for success in bilingual education, there are several factors that contribute to the effectiveness of programs under review. Among others, those factors include high expectations for language minority students, a strong English language development component, and program support at all levels.

After the passage of Proposition 227 in 1998, the school district struggled to reorganize its bilingual programs. This project examines the ways individual teachers and the school site dealt with the district leadership's interpretation of the proposition and how the program has changed in the wake of Proposition 227. It attempts to determine if the school is working effectively with the ELL's in the bilingual classrooms.

As the classroom teacher, I kept a journal of the effect the administrative decisions had on day-to-day instruction, outlining the implications for my classroom

practice and student placement decisions. My journal also reflected on some of the school-wide practices concerning ELL's and focused in on the parents' roles in obtaining bilingual instruction for their children.

Rationale

Bilingual education has been the center of much debate for decades in our country. Researchers and educators alike have passionately wrestled with conflicting hypotheses on the most effective program designs for the successful acquisition of English *and* academic skills within the school setting.

Researcher Stephen Krashen (1991) is one of the most well known supporters of bilingual education and continually offers research and information on the basic principles that underlie bilingual education in hopes of educating politicians, educators, and parents alike. If ELL students' only responsibility for the first three years of school were to learn English, they might have some success but what happens when they finally successfully comprehend their second language but are years behind their English speaking peers in academic knowledge? Krashen argues that students must be given comprehensible input in order to begin learning and acquiring a language. In order for information to be considered comprehensible, students must have some base of knowledge in their first language on which to build their second language.

He uses what he has called "The Paris Argument" to explain the theory behind this to the general public (1991). In this 'argument', he paints a scenario of someone who does not speak French, moving to Paris to accept a new job offer with a big company. If that person were to receive background information about the upcoming change in lifestyle in English before departing, such as how the company operates, what is expected, what schools are like for children, how to find a place to live, what proper etiquette is in the French company, and so on, this person would have an easier time functioning upon arriving in Paris. With all of this base knowledge, this person would

more easily understand what it is like in Paris and therefore, probably be able to focus on learning French more rapidly. This 'argument' explains the idea of bilingual education; "background knowledge can help make second language input more comprehensible, and can thus assist in the acquisition of the second language" (Krashen, 1991, p.1).

His arguments for bilingual education are also strongly rooted in the theories and philosophies of second language literacy. Reading is a process that requires comprehensible input in order to be successful. It is much easier to learn to read written language in one's native language, where the input is comprehensible. Once individuals know how to read, they can read and the ability transfers to other acquired languages.

Oral proficiency in a language is a prerequisite for reading proficiency. Rather than holding off on reading development, waiting for oral language to develop, why not begin literacy instruction in the native language while developing oral proficiency in the second language? Krashen states that "when schools provide children quality education in their primary language, they give them two things: knowledge and literacy. The knowledge that children get through their first language helps make the English they hear and read more comprehensible. Literacy developed in the primary language transfers to the second language" (p.1, 1997).

The sink or swim English immersion argument does not afford English Language Learning students the necessary amount of comprehensible input in reading development. There are many basics of our mainstream educational programs that do not fall into place when a student does not speak English. Traditional instructional methods do not always lead to success with ELL students. Reading has always been identified as one of the main keys to unlocking school success for students. However, with ELL's, the

traditional methods of teaching reading become much more complex and convoluted, requiring educators to take a hard look at their reading instruction practices and the role that spoken language plays in the acquisition of reading skills.

Trying to teach someone that the letter "a" makes the a sound, as in apple, does not make much sense when the learner has never heard the word apple and does not know what an apple is. English- speaking children are taught to read in their native language using comprehension strategies as a tool to facilitate the understanding and decoding of new and challenging words. Reading teachers, coach their students to "read to the end of the sentence and think about what makes sense there" and to "look at the pictures to make educated guesses about what the new written material might be saying". These strategies do not help a struggling reader when they do not know the name for what is in the picture or what the other words in the sentence mean. Typical beginning phonics lessons tie letter sounds into words that are familiar to the students, making sense of the written word to a beginning reader. As in all other subject areas, with good teaching, every attempt is made to bring students' prior knowledge and experience into a lesson. For example, in attempts to teach the sound the letter /c/ makes, cat and carrot might be offered as examples to a new reader to bring meaning to the letters. To non-English speakers, this is not helpful because the words cat and carrot are not a part of their prior knowledge base. This appears to lead to a simple conclusion; teach those students the English words to make the reading more meaningful. Unfortunately, it is not as simple as many would hope. It has been shown that it takes the average second language learner between four and ten years to acquire full proficiency in their second language

(Cummins, 1992) making it very difficult for ELL's to compete with their English speaking classmates along the way.

However, according to Krashen, reading skills are transferable. If we can instruct students to start using them while they learn to read in an understandable context, namely, their own language, as they develop oral proficiency in a second language, they will later be able to use those skills effectively in the second language.

Background and Need

Bilingual education is still adding to its long history in the United States as Americans attempt to find successful ways of educating the growing number of non-English speaking students in our school systems (Castellanos, 1983). This challenge is at the forefront of educational issues in California as we face a rapidly increasing population of Spanish speakers. Most people would agree that educators face a constant struggle of researching and developing the most effective methods for teaching our students how to succeed in the ever-evolving world around them. America's public schools are built around the premise that everyone is entitled to a fair and equal education should they so choose. California faces a particularly difficult challenge in providing equal access to this coveted education. More and more non-English speaking students are entering our schools every day. If the goal is to enable students to survive successfully in the world around them, language minority students have twice the amount of work to do as native English speakers. They must learn to speak English but should it be at the expense of learning the educational content available to their English proficient peers? With so many ELL's entering California's schools, the school systems need to find the most successful ways of educating them, and integrating them into the English-

speaking world. Not only must they survive in an academic setting with their second language but they must also become successful learners. The job many of California's teachers face is to enable these language minority students to do so.

Bilingual education as a means of servicing these students has had a complicated past in the court system (Castellanos, 1983). Two of the major legal decisions surrounding the issue were the passage of the Title VII Bilingual Education Act in 1968 and the 1974 Supreme Court decision Lau vs. Nichols. Title VII authorized funds for programs for students who spoke languages other than English. It funded 76 bilingual programs in its first year and served students of 14 different languages (Blanco, 1978). Lau vs. Nichols was even more of a landmark decision, sometimes compared to Brown vs. the Board of Education in its significance (Castellanos, 1983). It stated that school programs run in English only denied equal access to education for students who did not speak English. It said that school districts had a responsibility to help them overcome their language disadvantage (Castellanos, 1983). Unfortunately, both pieces of legislation left much room for interpretation. In 1982, Title VII was amended to give school districts the option to use Title VII funds to support projects that used only English if they wished. Meanwhile, the Lau decision failed to specify how ELL students must be helped. It did not mandate bilingual education but only stated that all students who do not speak English be served in some meaningful way.

Debates over how to best go about this have been central to discussions on education for many years. From bilingual education to English immersion for these students, popular opinion has swayed from one end of the spectrum to the other, and back

again, leading our students through a maze of strategies and philosophies without much consistency, or success.

Currently, the political driving force of policies on bilingual education in California is proposition 227 or the "English for the Children" proposition. In 1998, businessman Ron Unz of Southern California sponsored this proposition, which was voted into law, in effect outlawing bilingual education in the state. Instead, students are provided with one year of structured English instruction while they develop proficiency in English. They are then placed in mainstream English classrooms and expected to keep up with their peers. It has refueled the fire behind educational research in this arena and has heightened awareness of this area of education to some degree. This has brought about a multifaceted dilemma. A current problem is that legislation has passed but the interpretation and implementation of the law are so dramatically varied across school districts that measuring the effectiveness of bilingual versus new English immersion programs is extremely difficult. Although comparisons of this nature are difficult to make, many researchers have begun dissecting the components of effective and ineffective education programs as possible keys to successful reform.

Literature Review

Native Language Instruction and Academic English

Does native language instruction aid in acquisition of academic skills in English? Much of the research on this topic focuses on the effectiveness of bilingual education versus English Immersion. Unfortunately, more specific research on the appropriate balance of native language instruction and English instruction within bilingual programs is extremely vast and generally inconclusive or conflicting as to the exact protocol for

effective program design. It is a highly controversial and therefore broadly examined educational arena with little conclusive evidence for prescriptive recommendations. Finding statistically valid, unbiased longitudinal evidence documenting exact formulas for effective bilingual program designs is a difficult task. However, through all of this examination, there are some overarching themes or common threads in much of the research that speak not only to the positive educational outcomes of *some* use of native language instruction in the classroom but also some of the necessary characteristics of effective school programs.

Many studies in the realm of bilingual education strive to show that bilingual education does not work, that children in bilingual programs do not learn English and achieve less than their peers placed in English-only classrooms do. The main arguments rest on the assertion that the more time a student spends learning in English, the more quickly they will acquire it (Cummins, 1992). There is a considerable amount of evidence to the contrary.

In 1991, the U.S. Department of Education released the results of an eight- year longitudinal study (Ramirez, Yuen & Ramey, 1991) that was commissioned by the federal government to assess the effectiveness of three different program designs on the increased achievement of LEP (Limited English Proficient) students. The goal of the study was to discover which kind of program helped LEP students to close the educational achievement gap between themselves and their English- speaking peers. The study followed more than 2,000 LEP elementary school students for four years. Students were enrolled in one of three programs: Structured English-Immersion Strategy, Early-Exit and Late-Exit Transitional Bilingual Programs. The programs evaluated were

controlled for "critical background characteristics" that could possibly affect student success such as socioeconomic level, parent education, length of time in the U.S., teacher-training, etc. They differed in the amount of time students spent learning in their native language versus English and the number of years they spent in their programs before being transitioned into mainstream English classrooms. Students were evaluated in the subject areas of math, English reading, and English language. The findings of the study concluded that providing LEP students with substantial instruction in their native language does not impede or delay the acquisition of English language skills. In fact, actually providing more prolonged native language instruction, as in the late- exit programs, helped students to catch up to the English-speaking, norm-reference group more in English language arts, English reading, and math. Another finding of the study reported that parental involvement was the greatest in the programs that offered more native language instruction.

Jim Cummins (1992) evaluates the theories promoted by bilingual education advocates and those in opposition to the practice in light of the findings of the Ramirez Report. The students in the early-exit programs performed equally as well as those in the Structured Immersion classes thus, the report blatantly negates the argument that more time spent learning in English leads to greater English achievement. In addition, it shows that the children in the late-exit program, spending the most time in native language instruction, actually outperformed the other two groups in all areas, lending even more weight to the theoretical positions advocated by supporters of bilingual education.

Stephen Krashen has ardently argued in favor of bilingual education and the success that it affords many ELL's. He cites numerous studies that support the practice (Krashen, 1997).

A large portion of Krashen's research focuses on evaluating other studies and he has found that the "criticisms of bilingual education... rest on two assertions:... that bilingual programs do not work... and that 'immersion' is superior to bilingual education" (Krashen, 1991, p14). In investigating these assertions, he has found that the research is consistent, that bilingual programs do work and that almost all of the programs labeled as successful examples of immersion in these criticisms are actually different kinds of bilingual programs (Krashen, 1991). Although they have been labeled as English immersion programs, many of the studies he cites include a portion of their day's instruction in the native language and provide opportunities for literacy development in a student's first language, the primary tenants of bilingual education. Researcher Jay P. Greene is also responsible for some meta- analyses of bilingual programs and has focused on their effect on increasing test scores, in English, as a measure of their success. He has found that although many bilingual programs and programs labeled English immersion are seriously flawed and often mislabeled, overall, bilingual education programs are effective at increasing test scores in English (Greene, 1998).

It has been well documented that it takes anywhere from four to ten years to develop proficiency in a second language for most people so how is one year of structured English immersion equal compensation for an ELL's disadvantage? (Collier, 1988; Cummins, 1992 ;Ramirez, 1992). Some students do survive in a sink or swim

atmosphere of English immersion so many opponents of bilingual education argue that it is not necessary. Well, this is true; many students do succeed without it, but the majority of them are already literate and have subject matter knowledge in their primary language when they enter English classrooms. These students enter their "sink or swim' scenarios with two of the three objectives of a good bilingual program already met which Krashen points out is evidence in favor of bilingual education programs (Krashen, 1997).

Christine Rossell and Keith Baker are known for their 1996 Review of Bilingual Research literature. This review looked at 75 different studies that they determined were "methodologically acceptable" in order to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of native language instruction on the improvement of performance on English standardized tests for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. In direct contrast to the findings of the Ramirez Report, they stated that the conclusions they drew from this literature review were that children learn English best when they are taught in English (Rossell & Baker, 1996).

When proposition 227 came to the forefront of political debate, this conclusion supported the viewpoint of those opposed to bilingual education. Stephen Krashen (1996) criticizes their study, pointing out that among other flaws in their research methods, rather that delving into the programs they review to see what their actual curricular content consists of, they are content to evaluate programs simply based on the labels they have given themselves. Upon closer inspection of the programs, Krashen notes that many of the programs they found to be successful examples of English- only classrooms actually contained up to 90 minutes or more a day of native language instruction- a program characteristic labeled by many as bilingual education.

Noting that Rossell and Baker's conclusions were in opposition to many other studies, lead researcher Jay P. Greene looked more in depth at their review in the form of a meta-analysis (1997). In his meta-analysis, Greene states that the large majority of the studies they reviewed to reach these conclusions did not meet their own criteria for inclusion in their review. He notes the guidelines Rossell and Baker used to define which studies were methodologically acceptable: Studies "...had to: 1) Compare students in bilingual programs to a control group of similar students; 2) statistically control for differences between the treatment and control groups or assignment to treatment and control groups had to be done at random; 3) base results on standardized test scores in English; and 4) determine differences between the scores of treatment and control groups by applying appropriate statistical tests" (Greene, p. 2, 1997). Of the 75 studies they used to make an argument against bilingual education, Greene found only 11 to be acceptable according to their own stated guidelines. Fifteen of the studies were actually separately released reports of the same programs by the same authors. Here, Greene combined the reports to reflect one report on each of these studies. He also was unable to find five of the reports, even with the assistance of Christine Rossell and had to eliminate 3 studies because they did not review bilingual programs at all. An additional fourteen studies were discarded because they did not include either adequate control groups or randomized assignment for reliable conclusions. In fact, in most of these studies, he points out that the control group was also taught in their native language and in the target language. Greene also added his own criteria that only studies that evaluated programs that had been running for a year or more be included. This resulted in the loss of two more programs, formerly used to supply supportive evidence for the English immersion

argument- one of which was evaluated after seven weeks in a bilingual program and the other after ten weeks. With their criteria in mind, Greene concluded that only studies that compared programs with clear delineations between bilingual instruction programs, defined as using at least some native language instruction, and English-only programs were fair to compare to draw any defendable conclusions. The study does not investigate *how much* native language instruction is prudent, only whether some is used versus none.

When analyzing the eleven remaining studies that actually met Rossell and Baker's criteria for being "methodologically acceptable", Greene finds that the results of the Rossell and Baker study actually make a case in favor of bilingual education. When narrowing the field further to review only the five studies that were designed with a random assignment experimental design, the "highest quality research design" (p.3), the results show an even stronger argument for the positive effects of at least some native language instruction on children learning English.

Greene acknowledges that caution should be exercised when interpreting the results of his meta-analysis because it draws on a small pool of studies and that those studies were all drawn from the same literature review. However, he also points out that his review negates the validity of the Rossell and Baker study and that "it should not be the basis for policy decisions about bilingual education" (p.10). He concludes that the use of at least some native language use in instruction of LEP children is more likely to help student performance on English standardized tests.

Another important finding of this meta-analysis is that there is a very limited amount of sound, quality research on the issue of bilingual education. There is little

information regarding what guidelines should be driving program design, such as amount of instruction in the native language versus English.

One of the main tenants of bilingual education is that knowledge and skills acquired in the native language are transferable to the second language, especially in literacy (Cumins, 1992; Krashen, 1991). Researchers have shown that it takes children a long time to develop full proficiency in a second language. Though they may appear proficient on the playground and in social contexts early on, learning and success in cognitive and academically demanding contexts can take several years (Collier & Thomas, 1989). Bilingual programs aim to provide children with solid academic knowledge in their native language that will transfer once they do become proficient in English. Thus while English is being mastered, there is simultaneous cognitive growth occurring, leading the LEP student to be educated as well as English proficient when they do transfer into a mainstream English only classroom. "The native language and the second language are complimentary rather that mutually exclusive. Further, native language proficiency is a powerful predictor of the rapidity of second language development" (Hakuta, 1990, p.3).

Reading and literacy are two of the main subject areas that demonstrate this transfer of abilities. As Krashen states, "Once we can read in one language, we can read in general" (p.1, 1997). Reading in one's native language provides the comprehensible input that Krashen so often refers to. It also develops reading habits that can transfer to the second language and it contributes to first language enhancement, which provides a larger, stronger foundation for understanding second language input.

In her work with English as a second language instruction for adults, Klaudia Rivera (1999) looks at the role that native language literacy plays in the acquisition of English. She cites numerous studies that have shown that development of literacy in one's native language plays a large role in the successful development of literacy in a second language, acquisition of the second language, and academic achievement and suggests that this is because there is a transfer of the reading skills developed in the first language to the second language, in adults and children. She refers to a report published by Snow, Burnes and Griffin in 1998 on the prevention of reading difficulties in young children. the researchers recommend that "whenever possible, bilingualism and biliteracy should be promoted as it provides intellectual, economic, and social benefits ..." and that "... the use of the native language aids in the meaning- making process by allowing learners to read words they know and sentences they understand, to use context effectively, and to self- correct efficiently" (Rivera, 1999, p 1).

Effective Programs

When evaluating bilingual programs, it is generally agreed that the best bilingual programs include ESL instruction, sheltered subject matter teaching and first language instruction (Krashen, 1997). However, the majority of the research on the effectiveness of bilingual education admits that there are huge gaps in the implementation of programs and that there are no conclusions that can be made about exactly how many minutes of native language instruction should be balanced with exactly how many minutes of second language instruction. In other words, there are no undisputed, specific guidelines for realistic, affordable, successful program designs for bilingual instruction. However, there are many conclusions drawn about some of the common characteristics of successful

programs. Many of these characteristics are program-based but the majority of them surround school effectiveness above and beyond the bilingual programs.

Although there is limited reliable research on the balance of English and native language use within bilingual classrooms, there is some consistency in the research to support specific outlying characteristics of effective programs. Jeanne Rennie (1993) describes a variety of models for both bilingual and ESL programs. Although the program models vary greatly in the amount of native language instruction used, she outlines ten attributes identified by different researchers as characteristics of effective programs for ELL students:

1) Supportive whole-school contexts.
2) High expectations for language minority students as evidenced by active learning environments that are academically challenging.
3) Intensive staff development programs designed to assist ALL teachers, not just ESL or bilingual education teachers, in providing effective instruction to language minority students.
4) Expert instructional leaders and teachers.
5) Emphasis on functional communication between teacher and students and among fellow students.
6) Organization of the instruction of basic skills and academic content around thematic units.
7) Frequent student interaction through the use of collaborative learning techniques.
8) Teachers with a high commitment to the educational success of all their students.

9) Principals supportive of their instructional staff and of teacher autonomy while maintaining an awareness of district policies on curriculum and academic accountability.

10) Involvement of majority and minority parents in formal parent support activities (p. 3).

In their review of areas relevant to meeting the needs of LEP students, Gustavo Gonzales and Lento F. Maez (1995) highlight many of the same characteristics present in successful programs. They also add to their list, "high levels of parental satisfaction with the school" and generally, "the use of Spanish and English at the lower grades but mostly English at the upper grades" (p. 3). They also point out the problems and some of the barriers to achieving this parental satisfaction with the school. One of the main roadblocks to parental participation is that parents need to understand the functioning of the school system and what their rights and responsibilities are. Many parents lack a basic knowledge of the school culture and therefore, feel isolated and do not fully participate in their children's education. As educators of students from different cultures and language groups, schools must find successful means of educating parents of what their rights are for their children in order to expect them to actively participate in the educational process.

One study that compared the transitional bilingual education programs at a number of schools in Texas (Abelardo Villarreal Intercultural Developmental Research Association, 1999) resulted in many of the same recommendations for implementations of successful programs and voiced challenges faced by many struggling programs. In the study, the researchers found two conditions, referred to as "dimensions" in the research, that were

primarily responsible for dictating the levels of success or failure of the programs. The two dimensions were "1) support of the program at all levels and 2) knowledge base of bilingual education as evidenced through curriculum and instructional activities" (p.6). The knowledge base is defined as research based knowledge of second language learning methodologies on all levels of the school hierarchy and the word 'support' is inclusive of moral, fiscal, and physical support for bilingual and ESL programs and teaching methods. The authors categorize schools into one of four subgroups, making recommendations to the struggling schools based on what was effective in the more successful schools. They outline these recommendations in the form of challenges these schools face. Some of the key challenges listed are:

1) Make transitional bilingual education an integral part of the mainstream curriculum; this includes providing the same resources in the native language as in English. Too often the English materials are updated and the native language materials are left behind, leaving these teachers without access to the mainstream curriculum for their ELL students.
2) Provide staff development opportunities to *all* staff members, not just bilingual or ESL teachers, to improve or learn effective teaching strategies for second language learners.
3) Recruit competent bilingual teachers.
4) Provide guidance and leadership to new bilingual teachers.
5) Involve the families and community in educational planning decisions.
6) Establish a program that utilizes the linguistic strengths of the students and their families.

7) Make grade level content accessible to all students, giving them equal educational opportunities.
8) Utilize instruction that advocates biliteracy development and simultaneous content acquisition. Strong, informed, supportive leadership was central to meeting each of the challenges outlined.

All of the programs reviewed in these pieces of research used differing amounts of native language and English instruction, but there are some common threads that run through all of the descriptions of effective programs. Each of them focuses on meeting the needs of the children at the school site and centers on the importance of full staff buy-in, promoted and fostered by the administration, for successful bilingual programs. Integration of ELL's curriculum with that of the mainstream was also of central importance and above all was the necessity of high expectations for all ELL's on the part of all members of the school community.

Methodology

School Setting and Program History

I teach a bilingual third grade at a K-5, Title 1 school with 750 students in the East Bay. Our school has gone through many changes since I was hired three years ago. In September 1998, our school district created middle schools, resulting in the reconfiguration of all school sites and populations. Prior to that time, our school site served grades K-7. As if transitioning to a K-5 school weren't enough, we also had a 65% turnover rate in teaching staff and a 90% change in our student population. A host of teachers moved in from what became the middle school and from schools outside the district and 9 new teachers like myself were hired fresh out of credential programs or

with emergency credentials. The bilingual program that I am a part of was also moved into our school at that time. To top it all off, two weeks before school started, the district's Director of Elementary Education passed away and our school principal took her position, leaving us without a principal for the first 5 months of school. Needless to say, it was not a smooth transition for anyone- teacher, student, or family member.

Incorporating the bilingual program into our school that year also coincided with the passage of proposition 227, also known as the Unz Initiative or the "English for the Children" proposition, fundamentally outlawing bilingual education. This threw our district office into an upheaval as well, leaving very few reliable resources for the teachers in the program. At our school, I was hired as a new teacher for third grade in the bilingual program, two teachers "in training", still working toward credentials, were hired to teach kindergarten and second grade and the first grade teacher with four years of experience moved in from the middle school. In addition, none of the Spanish materials made the move to the new school. New teachers always lack materials and we then needed to try to acquire materials in two languages. We were in need of some guidance and there was very little to be found.

Proposition 227 had passed mandating that we could no longer offer our students instruction in Spanish and yet we had 49% of our school population with Limited English proficiency, many of whom were Spanish speaking only. Before the passage of 227, our district's program was supposedly based on an early- exit transition program, meaning that students were offered bilingual classes through third grade being gradually transitioned into English immersion classes by fourth grade. In the fall of 1998, all the bilingual teachers in our district were told it was no longer legal to instruct our students in

their native language. Yet, there was a lot of discussion about offering waivers to some students whose parents requested them.

These early- exit transition classes were also renamed as a Dual Language Immersion Program. This is a mislabel because dual language immersion is a program design in which classes are comprised of half native speakers of English and half native speakers of the L2. The goal is to have all students become bilingual by the end of the program. In our program, these "dual language immersion classes" are still only offered to the same population as the early- exit classes and the service of native language instruction is only offered to students within those classes whose parents request a waiver. The goal is not to have the students become literate and fluent in both languages, but to master English enough to be mainstreamed into an English only classroom by fourth grade. Once they are in these classes, they can only receive Spanish instruction in language arts, and then, only until third grade.

While this sounds like it still offers options to parents, it neglects to look at the facts and details surrounding this "program." For starters, students are not allowed a waiver, even if requested, if they have ever been in an English only (EO) class. Regardless of how successful or unsuccessful that student was in the EO class, it is not seen as educationally sound to offer them instruction in Spanish.

The second year of teaching at my school brought with it fresh ideas and a renewed energy for developing curriculum and educating our administration and faculty. We decided to devote one of our weekly common planning times to meet as a bilingual team, rather that with our respective grade levels. This started rather well but we quickly realized how difficult this was going to become. There were already so many other

interferences with this precious collaboration time that we found it challenging to stick to the schedule we had planned out. There were already monthly SELAC (Site ELL Advisory Committee) meetings that the four of us were required attend at this time and once a month our staff met as a whole. In third grade, my kids do much of the same work as the other third grade classes with more support in Spanish for students with waivers. I wrestled with the choice of straying too far from what the "other kids" were doing. At what point would it become an unfair cost to my students to focus on my bilingual team when all the third graders were supposed to be getting prepared to enter the same fourth grade settings? Somehow, we managed to get in some meeting time every month, if not an entire planning time. We invited our administrators to these meetings and got our principal to attend one eventually. Simultaneously, the word was coming down the pipes so to speak about the upcoming Coordinated Compliance Review. Needless to say, with this looming in the foreground, she was more willing to help us get materials to support our semblance of a program. We were given some Title 1 and EIA monies to purchase some leveled books, levels 1-22 for reading levels from kindergarten to the middle of second grade, in Spanish. We worked together to build a Spanish book room in the library that we could all pull from for guided reading. This did not get put together until the very end of the year by the time we knew how much money we had and did the ordering, and so on. It was a huge step none- the- less. The California Association for Bilingual Educators, (CABE) conference was also being held in San Francisco that year and we were all able to attend. We also made it a goal to make our way through all of the grade levels and explain what our program is about so that they might be more supportive of it. We got around to some of the grade levels. Our

biggest challenge was the kindergarten teachers and they managed to make it through the entire year not having twenty minutes to meet with us so we are up against that challenge again this year.

This Year's Beginnings

The beginning of this year brought the customary turmoil along with it. As I anxiously awaited my class list I wondered how many of my students would speak Spanish this year and how many would have never heard the language before. Along with this worry was my wonder if the children in my class who did speak Spanish would be able to read or write it and to what degree.

Reviewing my class list, I saw that I had two Spanish- speaking students who I had retained and another retained third grader from a different class who did not speak Spanish. As far as I could tell, he was the only student on my list who didn't speak Spanish, but then again, I also had a student who was new to our school and no knowledge of his abilities or background.

As the first day rolled around, the confusion escalated as we learned that all third grade classes were overenrolled. Each of us had 21 or 22 students in classes that had a 20-student limit. Generally, the first few weeks of school are somewhat traumatic for everyone as they settle in and get down the routines and patterns of the classroom. This is usually exaggerated for me due to the fact that I am constantly struggling with the parent communication and language issue, having to send home all parent communication in two languages and figuring out which family needs information in which language.

As I got to know my class, I recognized characteristics in each of my students that embodied the variations I see every year in one form or another. I had Daniel, a non-Spanish speaking retainee, Gregorio my new student who was thankfully very bright and bilingual and biliterate, and a combination of other bilingual but not necessarily biliterate, students from different second grade classes. Fourteen of them were from the second grade bilingual class and only a portion of them had signed waivers on file. Their language proficiencies and reading abilities varied greatly. The two children in my class who I had retained were both learning to read in English and having great difficulty in reading and in math but were native Spanish speakers with Spanish speaking parents. Both of these girls had been in a bilingual class in second grade but neither of them had a signed waiver on file and therefore, were not eligible to receive instruction in Spanish. One of these students, Ana, has a very convoluted history. She was in an English immersion kindergarten and then her parents moved to Mexico where the school decided that she did not know enough in Spanish so they retained her in kindergarten. Upon her return to the states the following year, our school looked at her age and placed her in a bilingual second grade. She was placed in the bilingual class for second grade but due to her previous placement in an English-only kindergarten, she was not allowed a waiver. She never got a first grade education in either language and here she was in my third grade class for the second time with very low abilities in either language.

I also had two very bright boys in my class who were about the same levels as Luis in their reading and writing in both languages. Then there was Miguel who had been in the bilingual class the first time he was in second grade. In that bilingual class, he was instructed in English reading since his parents had not signed a waiver. He had then been

retained a second year in second grade and moved to an English only class where he made very little progress and came to me reading a level 11 in English (first grade level), and not at all in Spanish.

After the first two days of school, I got my twenty-first student, Luis, from another third grade teacher who had had him in her class for two days but then realized he didn't speak any English and had him moved into my room. A couple days later, I received my twenty -second student, Mayra, new to our school. Mayra spoke both languages but was more proficient in her English reading and writing.

The Waiver Signing Process

The next several weeks proved to be very nerve-wracking for everyone as the school district decided what they wanted to do with all of the extra students in third grade and we all waited to see who would be spending the year with us. There was talk of making a 3-4-combination class because the fourth grade wasn't full and there was also talk of moving them to another school altogether. We were also in the process of deciding who would be early birds and late birds based on reading ability, and who takes the bus, during this time. Needless to say, without enough desks or an idea of who was going to be in my class the remainder of the year, getting all of my class systems started and my children adjusted to them was not an easy task to complete.

During the second week of school, the third year of this so-called program, we held our annual Back to School Night. Back to School Night is the time when parents have to opportunity to sign the first step of their waivers to qualify their children for the Dual Language Immersion Program. In order for parents to enroll their children in the

Dual Language Immersion Program, they come to school twice to sign a waiver that basically states that their child has a disability and needs instruction in Spanish. The meeting is held half an hour before Back to School Night in the cafeteria with terrible acoustics and a person translating English legalese into Spanish legalese for 200 parents and screaming children. In addition, there are many of the other families who only speak English already in the cafeteria talking because the waiver information is meaningless to them. Once the meeting is over, some of the parents who either understood what was being said or already had their children in the program the year before come to the back of the cafeteria and can sign an *intent* to sign a waiver, the first step in the process. That being done, they must return to school no less than twenty-four hours later to sign the actual waiver. This sounds like a hassle enough but when one looks at the socio-economic status and educational level of many of our school's parents, it becomes even more ridiculous. Many of our parents cannot come to Back to School Night so they do not get the information. Others who can take time off work to make it cannot afford to take time off again to return to school to sign the second form and, therefore, never complete the process, leaving their children ineligible for the program.

One of the other caveats in this whole waiver process is that teachers are not legally allowed to solicit waivers or to give their opinions on what they think is best for individual students unless they are specifically asked, by the parent, to do so. Now, in order for a parent to ask the teacher's opinion on the best placement options for their children, they must understand the process and their choices. Not even mentioning the parents who don't come to the meeting to find out they have a choice, the big problem is that the majority of parents who do come to the meeting do not understand the waivers at

the end of it and move on with the regular Back to School Night activities and never consider it. To make things more complicated, this year, a few days after Back to School Night, we were informed that parents who requested a waiver could not be given one if their children were ever in an English only classroom or if they had ever been in a bilingual classroom for a year with no waiver.

There is a larger issue here that goes unspoken at our school regarding this waiver process. If parents have questions about the program at any other time than Back to School Night, they are supposed to ask an administrator. Unfortunately, neither of our administrators speaks or understands Spanish, nor does anyone on our office staff. This adds to the complexity for parents, often deterring them form pursuing the idea. In my opinion, this also leads to the overall message that the program is not supported by the administration, therefore giving it less merit.

All of those hurdles aside, if a parent makes it through to actually sign both portions of the waiver, and their child is eligible to receive the services, there is only one class available at each grade level. If they fill up, kids can be on waiting list or be moved to another school that has room in their program. On the other hand, if they do not fill up, our classes are then filled with non- Spanish speakers, often with many of their own learning and behavior difficulties, adding more problems to the scenario.

The Teachers

Another problem with the lack of support and the confusion about the program becomes apparent when I look at my bilingual team members. The district philosophy underlying the continuation of language arts support in Spanish leads to slowly

transitioning students into English reading after they have become proficient readers in Spanish. The problem is that although the district may support this in theory, they do not provide the materials or classroom support to do it in practice. When the program moved to our school, there were no Spanish materials related to the state adopted language arts series sent with it for grades K, 2 or 3. The first grade teacher at our school has been with the program since before the shift in program design and school site location. As a result, she brought her materials with her and has many materials to support her Spanish teaching. She holds fast to the philosophy that children should be given a strong foundation in native language arts instruction before transitioning them to English. Aside from the complications that can arise when a child is not progressing in Spanish reading, this has led to many frustrations on behalf of the second grade teacher. Like, me, she has few Spanish materials and in addition, she has a different philosophy on bilingual education. She believes that in order to get her kids to be competitive she needs to give them that extra edge in English but doesn't always 'complete' their Spanish reading instruction, defined as helping them reach at least a level 20 before transitioning. The issue at hand is that ideally, students should be reading at least a level 20 in Spanish by the end of first grade and ready for English in second grade. Unfortunately, as with English speaking children often times reading does not come as easily as it should. While students reading in English have access to other reading interventions such as summer school, after school programs Title I and so on, there are no services for students struggling in Spanish reading. I should note that both of these teachers, like almost all of the teachers at my school, have the best of intentions and the highest of expectations for all of their students. The district has some guidelines for the program but without

providing teachers with the materials and support they need to implement them, personal teaching philosophies seemingly take over due to frustrations and lack of communication.

Interventions

Working at a low- income school has some advantages. We have several interventions set up to help our lowest performing, struggling students. As I said earlier, we are a Title I school. This means that because of the number of students we teach that receive a free or reduced lunch from the government, based on family income level, we are considered to be in need of extra support in reading and math. We currently do not service any of our students in math, but we do have reading teachers that teach small group (2-4 students) pull out classes in reading to our low achieving students. Up until last year, we also had Reading Recovery at our school which is an intensive one on one intervention in first grade for students who are targeted early with reading difficulties. Unfortunately, we do not have any teachers that provide these services in Spanish so there is no one to assist the students in our classes who are struggling with Spanish reading. Just this year, our district has started an after school intervention program for reading as well. It takes place two days a week for an hour where students who are considered "Red Zone" students, those with low standardized test scores, are given intensive, phonics based, leveled reading practice in smaller class settings. Unfortunately, to get into this program, a student must be a proficient enough English reader to read and understand a pre-designated reading passage. I have three students in my class who are well below grade level in reading in both English and Spanish who did not read well enough in English to be allowed into the program. One of them, Luis, came

into my class in October and does not speak English well enough to enter the program. At mid- year, he read well below grade level in Spanish, about a level 8 (when he is supposed to be at a level 30 at the minimum) and English, a level 4 which is understandable because his oral English skills are so limited. Unfortunately, since he was at another school last year that did not have a bilingual program, he has been enrolled in an EO class and is not eligible for a waiver even if his parents request one. He picked up very little English last year, which does not speak well for the English immersion argument, and has very limited understanding of school in general. Unfortunately for Luis, I cannot work on Spanish reading with him and with his low English skills, he cannot attend the after school intervention program or Title I. He is far from unique in his situation at our school, and in our state for that matter. How in the world are we supposed to help children like Luis succeed without programs and supports in place for them?

Another of my students, Juan, is a different case entirely that well represents the dilemma that the first and second grade teachers face with many of there students who are reading below grade level in Spanish. He does have a signed waiver and therefore, I am allowed to work on Spanish reading with him. He has been in the bilingual program at our school since second grade when he moved here from Mexico. He was behind in Spanish and English reading but fortunately got the hang of reading in Spanish near the end of second grade, due in large part to parental support. He is now an excellent decoder in Spanish and progressing well in English but his comprehension skills are preventing him from moving on in either language. Because his English skills are still so poor, he is not able to receive Title I help yet. The Title I teacher's job is not to teach

English. Juan is very bright and wants to learn but there isn't time in the day to help him one on one to give him that boost in comprehension. Our English speakers go to Title I teachers and work in a 3 to 1 setting or better, to have more time answering those critical decoding and comprehension questions... "What do you think is happening here so far? I know the 'a' makes that sound sometimes but when you say the 'a' that way here, is it a word you recognize? Can we try this word pronouncing the 'a' with the other sound it makes? Now, is it a word that you know? Does it make sense in the story?" With kids like Juan that I work with all the time, the word doesn't make sense with either sound of "a" because he doesn't know the word! However, activities like this and intensive, uninterrupted instruction really provide results for my English proficient students. How wonderful and helpful it would be to have someone to work this way with Juan in Spanish and really get him up to grade level in his comprehension in at least one language while he works on gaining oral proficiency in his second language. I can only imagine if this service had been available to him in second grade, where he would be now!

My bilingual team members are fighting this battle daily with many of their students who are below grade level in Spanish and English. They have many students with waivers who are learning to read in their native language but struggling and there is no extra help for these kids. What is the answer for these students? One answer continually pops up for us as a possibility if pull out support is the goal for these students- move them into EO classrooms. Seems simple enough right? Unfortunately, and predictably, it isn't so simple. In looking at two different groups of their peers in the EO classes who are struggling, we get a good picture of the challenges they might face

should they be moved into one of those classrooms instead. Their native English-speaking peers are, for the most part, improving in the Title I program but their Spanish speaking peers face one of two problems. They either don't speak or understand enough English to get into the Title I program and they're left with no reading ability in either language, waiting for their oral proficiency to develop in English, or they are in the Title I program but it is not helping them because of their limited English understanding. Let me say that of course, as with anything involving children and education, there are some exceptions to all of this but in general, they appear to be few and far between and this really paints a picture of the struggles these students are facing in our district.

Learning problems are also identified much later in children who are Spanish speaking but in EO classrooms at my school. Most teachers are unable to identify learning problems in non-English speaking students because of the lack of communication and understanding between students and teachers. If a child is not progressing, it can take a few years before anyone recognizes that it is for some other reason than a language barrier. By that time, the child is even further behind. This seems to be an argument for bilingual education since as a Spanish speaker working with Spanish speaking students in their native language a teacher can possibly pick up on learning difficulties sooner. Unfortunately, here again I find a flaw in this whole program. Once the problems are noted and we finally make it through the SST and testing processes, if the child does qualify for special services, there is no one to render them in Spanish! We are actually lucky that we have a bilingual speech and language teacher and that our school psychologist is capable of giving assessments in both languages. However, should a student be referred to our resource specialist to work on

reading and they are in a bilingual classroom, they will have to work on reading in English with her since there is no resource available in Spanish. The resource teacher's assistant actually speaks Spanish so she can form a bridge for those children but in terms of reading instruction, it must be in English.

Even as someone who does speak Spanish, identifying learning problems and language issues with my Spanish speaking ELL students can prove very challenging. For a child who has shown success throughout the bilingual program and then as he or she transitions to English seems to be having more problems, we can usually attribute the problems to language issues and realize they simply are still developing proficiency in English. There are those students who cannot perform a task in either language when given a choice, which would lead many to believe there may be some bigger problem going on. However, if those students haven't had waivers all along or have been moved about so much that they have had no consistent instruction in Spanish, how can we expect them to perform on Spanish assessments any better than English ones?

In addition, we do not have any other teachers, administrators or office staff that speak Spanish or understand the program. There is no extra funding available to buy materials to meet the needs of the kids who are able to come through with waivers anyway. It leaves bilingual teachers with a choice to spend their classroom money on Spanish books or English books. When we are trying to transition these students from one language to another, it seems fairly obvious that resources in both languages need to be equally accessible. When only half of my class has signed waivers, how do I choose who to spend the money on?

Part of our school-wide English Language Development (ELD) program involves 20 minutes a day of ELD in every classroom using our district adopted materials. These materials are extremely inadequate and do not address the differing levels of proficiency within a single classroom with any success. We do have a little ESL pull- out for students who are low level limited English Proficient (LEP). Students who come into some classes with little or no English are pulled out of their classrooms for a certain amount of time per week for some small group work on their English development. These are only the lowest English speakers. Some of the EO kindergarten teachers get a "push in" bilingual aide in their room for a short period of time to help with struggling ELL's. The bilingual kindergarten teacher is not credentialed yet so she still has this aide for a period of time too. The rest of us on the bilingual team all have our Bilingual, Crosscultural, Language and Academic Development (BCLAD) credentials and so we are not allocated any time for additional help with our newest non-English speakers. I know in my own classroom the array of abilities in English among my students is just as vast as any other third grade class. None of my other students needs the kind of help that Luis does for example. In order for me to help him develop his English at the level he needs, I would have to do one-on-one lessons with him or include other students in his small group who are actually ready for much more challenging English language development activities. Either way, it prevents me from meeting the needs of all of my students in the best way possible. Unfortunately for students in our bilingual classes, those of us with BCLAD credentials are apparently seen as super teachers with more hands, eyes, and time for small group work than other teachers. Fortunately for Luis and me, there was a mix up in some paperwork at the beginning of the year and the ELD

coordinator did not realize that I have my BCLAD. A time slot for pullout was made for Luis and two of my other lower level LEP students and they receive extra help a few times a week. However, the fact that it took a logistical mix up to get him the services he needs seems ridiculous to me!

Bilingual Classes Becoming Dumping Grounds?

This year, one of the things we are continuing to struggle with as teachers in this program is that our classes in many cases appear to be dumping grounds for children who are slower learners or possibly have learning disabilities. I have felt this way for a couple of years as the third grade teacher because learning discrepancies become even more apparent as children age. I have seen several students get placed into my classroom in the past few years that were never educated in a bilingual classroom and have no Spanish reading abilities. Their second grade teachers noticed marked learning problems or a basic lack of progress and since their primary or home language was Spanish, they decided that either I could bridge that gap for them or that since learning wasn't working in English, maybe they should take a stab at learning something in Spanish. If every third grade class can only have twenty students, the obvious next step must be to move a student out of my bilingual class to make room for this new low achieving student. Who gets moved out? Well, the usual choice seems to be those students who do not "need" the support anymore. Unfortunately, those students are invariably the higher achieving, faster learning students. As a result, my class ends up being heavily weighted with low achieving students who do not necessarily have the academic background knowledge to achieve in Spanish either. This type of class arrangement leaves my bilingual class then, as a remediation intervention. If students are exited out of our program when they have

achieved a suitable level of proficiency in English, what I'm left with in this program by the time students reach third grade is, in essence, a class full of struggling students without successful student role models.

I was feeling as if I was the one receiving the brunt of all of this "dumping" and was very frustrated. In talking to other teachers on my bilingual team, I discovered that I was not alone. This was happening at all the grade levels, even in kindergarten. Of the six kindergarten classes at our school, there are over 35 Spanish speaking students. None of the other kindergarten teachers speaks Spanish. These teachers were taking it upon themselves to select those new kindergartners that seemed to be the slowest at picking up new things, such as language, and placing them in the bilingual class. While this may appear logical at first, the end result is that while the bilingual teacher is already focusing on teaching in two languages, what she ends up with is a group of lower achieving students on the whole, producing a kind of tracked kindergarten.

Even if a child were granted a waiver and placed into my classroom for the first time in the program at third grade, assuming I had the resources, there is not enough academic time to teach beginning Spanish reading and transition a student to English reading in time for fourth grade. Nor do I have time, or is it fair to my other students, to teach beginning reading in either language to more students than any of the other third grade teachers. In a district with a population such as ours, there will undoubtedly be at least one if not more students in every classroom who are still beginning readers by third grade, due to social promotion, minimal attendance, learning problems, and transience issues. We all end up with a generally equal number of these students in our rooms. We all know that these students require more assistance than others when trying to learn third

grade material so in response to this problem, it is necessary to divide these "needy" children up so as to provide some sort of equity among the classes. When an inordinate number of these students get "dumped" into our classrooms, it makes our job even that much more challenging. We are already responsible for helping our students overcome language barriers while trying to keep them/ get them on par in all subjects with their English speaking peers. Adding larger problems to the load cannot be fair to us, the teachers, and especially not to the other students in our classes.

I feel that this is an even more important, or more apparent, issue in third grade because they only have one more year to prepare for fourth grade where all classes are taught in English only. We felt as a team that something had to be done to communicate our roles as teachers in this program to our colleagues at the school to try to avoid this in the future.

As I said before, we attempted to educate all the grade levels on what our program is supposed to be like and doing so is an ongoing struggle. In addition, our administration has now been notified that if a student did not have a waiver before and they were in an English only class, they do not have access to getting a waiver because instruction in Spanish would no longer be educationally sound practice. This sounds helpful on the surface as well but unfortunately, many of those issues that plague our district such as transience have a very direct effect on my classroom make up. If there were twenty students with signed waivers in the bilingual second grade class, chances are that at least three of those students would not continue onto third grade at our school, leaving three open spaces in my third grade classroom (not to mention the drop-off that would have already occurred between first and second grade the year before). Those

spots are filled eventually and most teachers still put those struggling kids into those spots. Although they cannot be granted waivers, it is hoped that at least I can communicate with them and support their learning better than the English only speaking teachers. This leads to the same end, resulting in a frustrated teacher and an unfair disadvantage to my other students.

My Students

As for my class make up this year, for the first time, I ended up with twenty students who all at least understand Spanish. To my relief, all of my students' parents read in Spanish, if they read at all, this year so I have a break from writing all of my parent communication twice. The intricacies and frustrations begin to appear when I again look more closely at not only the range of abilities my students have but the restrictions or liberties I have in working with each of them. I discussed earlier some of my students' challenges. Those challenges go on and we muddle through but as I get some perspective on the year, I am able to see where our work is succeeding and where it is falling short.

Miguel is still having serious problems and we are finally going to get some testing for him to see where his problems may lie. Luis is still struggling along and much more social than anything else. He also continues to miss a lot of school and does not show much initiative for learning in either language. I have had many discussions with his parents and do not seem to get much of a response from them. He has been reading in Spanish at home and I make sure he has books at his level in Spanish for free reading. I also do guided reading with him in English and he is making some progress. At the

beginning of the year, he did not speak much at all in either language. He started the year reading at a level 1 in English and a level 6 in Spanish, both levels for a student in the beginning of kindergarten. He is now reading at a level 18 (late first grade-early second), in Spanish and a level 5 (end of kindergarten), in English, showing progress. He continues to go to his ESL pull- out for language development and is starting to use words in English to communicate his basic needs. He understands many of the classroom expectations and can speak in simple sentences to his friends. I can see how much easier it is for him to develop his Spanish reading for a few reasons. First, he is able to understand what he is reading in Spanish and it interests him. In English, he can understand the books at his level (5) but he is eight years old and books with four words on a page do not have a high interest level for a child of that age during free reading. Second, he is slowly developing an oral proficiency in English and can read words that he knows orally but his oral proficiency in Spanish is higher and he therefore has a higher level of vocabulary that he can recognize. Although I cannot prove that they are directly related, it is interesting to me that as his Spanish reading improves, so does his spoken English and vice versa.

Ana continues to receive Title 1 help and her comprehension is improving daily. She is extremely bright and has a lot of success in math but unfortunately, she is caught at her present reading level (17) for a while because she has reached a plateau at a level consistent with her oral English proficiency. The Title 1 teacher says that while she is decoding better and better, she is having more and more trouble with new vocabulary and the meaning of the words. Her English needs more time to catch up to her reading skills before she can move on. Although Ana's situation was exceptional, moving back and

forth and missing first grade entirely, her case is very representative of about four of my other students and many of the students I have had in past years. These students make it to third grade with insufficient reading skills in any language. For some, it is due to extenuating circumstance such as unidentified learning disabilities and the children have not learned to read in their native language even when placed in a bilingual class. For others there are stories of inconsistencies like Ana and movement in and out of bilingual classes like Miguel. They do not have waivers so I cannot help them with their Spanish reading and they do not have enough English to progress in Title 1 or qualify for our after school reading intervention.

A couple weeks ago, I also came to the realization that Ana's self-esteem is really suffering as well because she is embarrassed that she cannot read in Spanish. We sat down for ten minutes and I pulled out a basic Spanish reader. We talked about syllables and sounding out words for a couple seconds and the next thing she knew she was reading in Spanish. Her face lit up and I could just see how happy she was. I told her and her parents that she should do all the Spanish reading she wants at home. Obviously she didn't pick up a third grade level Spanish book and start reading fluently but it was interesting to see the process of teaching reading in a bilingual class work backwards in a way. I have watched Ana struggle with English reading for almost two years and seen her confusion as she comes across unknown words. In that ten minutes, I saw how much easier it was for her to decode and make sense of what was in front of her when it was in a language she understands better. One could argue that it made sense because she learned many of the basics of reading in English. But watching her put her basic reading skills quickly into action in Spanish really made me think; if she had been able to spend

time trying to master those reading skills in a language she understood, she might have developed them much faster and the last year and a half with me and the Title 1 teacher may have been much more productive for her.

As for Juan, his English has improved a lot and a spot opened up for Title I reading support. He now goes twice a week for small group help. Before the Title 1 spot opened up, Juan really got a chance to develop his Spanish reading comprehension skills at home and in the classroom and along with that, I have seen him become much more involved in class and a lot more aware of what we are learning when we are working in English. Of course someone could bring up the 'chicken or the egg' argument here; is the Spanish reading comprehension helping him understand more of what is going on in class or is he more aware of our academic subjects and therefore, improving in reading comprehension? It seems logical that as he gains more world knowledge through is reading, more of our classroom subject matter makes sense, he's reading more, giving him more background knowledge, making more classroom information comprehensible input.

Two of my other students are extremely bright and came to me from backgrounds of English only classrooms. They both came to me as fluent English readers and might represent the argument that learning to read in one's native language is not a necessary component of school success. However, when I look at the big picture for these two boys, I have to notice that although they primarily speak Spanish at home, each of them has a parent who speaks and reads English at home and they are both very high performing students in all areas in addition to reading.

As for the remaining majority of my class, they are all reading on or above grade level in both languages. When I go back and look through their records, they all went through bilingual classrooms from kindergarten and all of them learned to read successfully and without difficulty in Spanish and had little if any problems transitioning into English reading.

I cannot say with any certainty that the outcome would not have been the same for these students without the bilingual program but I am very pleased that they are all successful students, doing the same work as, if not better than, their English speaking only peers, and they are bilingual and biliterate. They are all progressing in their ELD and most of them are well on their way to being redesignated as FEP (Fluent English Proficient).

Second Grade's Question and Placement Decisions

In February, a second grade teacher approached me about discussing the placement of a couple of her students for next year. She wanted to know if I would sit down with her and the ELL coordinator and discuss some of her English Language learning students. She has two LEP students in particular who are not making much progress in reading or other subjects and wondered if she should be placing them in my class next year as usual, if they should be retained, or what the next step should be. She was at her wit's end with these students and needed some answers. I ended up meeting with the ELL coordinator and the entire second grade team (seven teachers) because they all had similar situations and questions. I was thrilled that they were finally asking to be educated on what to do with these students and asking what our program was about and

what services it provided. Unfortunately, it also left me feeling even more helpless as I found myself in front of these people asking for my help and I did not have a clear answer for them! Anyway, it was good to sit down and get a perspective from some other teachers who are not in our "program" and help to identify some of their frustrations, also in front of our ELL coordinator. I basically laid out what our program would look like for these students in my classroom in third grade. I had to tell these teachers that if they placed these struggling students in my classroom, the students would actually get less one on one support in reading and English Language Development. If they are in my room and their English is strong enough, they can go to the Title I teacher like other English-speaking students. But, since I have a "B" for Bilingual in front of my CLAD, it is assumed that I have more time and materials to work with students one on one for English development than any other third grade teacher with the same number of students. There would be no hope of their students receiving pull- out English instruction as there might be in an EO classroom. They were very surprised to hear how little support there would be for their students the following year and realized how ridiculous this all sounded. We started a discussion that led us to the conclusion that aside from the issues of the bilingual placements for students, something more has to be done to help all of our ELL's. We discussed the possibility of leveled after school interventions of teaching English. Standardized testing looks like it is not going to go away anytime soon and low achieving kids at our school get targeted as "red zone" students based on their test scores. We started discussing why many of our red zone kids are where they are and realized that many of our kids are struggling with the test because of language difficulties in reading. Yes, we have begun our after school reading intervention program for our

students who speak English well enough but we need something to get many of our students ready to even enter that program.

We then got into a discussion about retention and I felt terrible that I had no answers for them as to when to retain a child that is struggling with language problems. California is on a fast track to do away with social promotion right now, which leaves us many questions for our ELL's. On paper, our district mandates retention for students who fail to meet state standards. Realistically, we cannot retain the high number of students who do not and the research the district refers to shows that retention is usually an unsuccessful intervention. We are pushed to find and document reasons to promote the majority of these low achieving students and one of the reasons often used is students' limited English proficiency. The confusion for most of us is, when do we draw the line between what says they will not survive in the next grade and what is not fair to hold against them because of language issues. There are many children who are falling through the cracks at one end of the spectrum or the other. There are those kids whose teachers do not realize how bright they are because their communication skills are so limited and they are held back. There are those kids who really do not have any world knowledge or skills in either language. Some teachers pass those kids right through the system waiting for them to start understanding enough English to succeed. At the same time, we all have to question if we have the right to retain these kids when we as a school are not providing them with any opportunities to develop their world knowledge or skills in anything but English. Recently, at the end of our second trimester, we were given forms to send home with our students who are at risk for retention that informed parents of this fact. The letter had a huge space right in the middle where I was expected to list

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the intervention services that had been offered to each student whether they accepted them or not. I met with my vice principal and informed her that our school did not offer any intervention services for the majority of my at- risk students and asked her what to do with the forms. I was told to list the special activities that we do in my classroom instead!

We still have not come up with a sufficient answer to this dilemma other than to look long and hard at those kids coping skills in their English immersion classrooms and try to identify if they will sink or swim so to speak in the next grade level. I assessed the Spanish reading skills of a few students in the English only classes who are not progressing with English reading and I found that they could not read in Spanish either. This does not leave us much that is fair to go on in deciding retentions however. Why would they be able to read in Spanish if they have never been instructed in it? The one thing this did make me start looking into however was the number of students at our school who are in the same situation.

Our district seems to be very focused on providing interventions for our low achieving students. This year, the main component was the after school reading program- the one students do not qualify for if they do not already read at a minimal level or if their English is not strong enough. I visited all the grade levels and asked them to compile a list of the students who they thought would benefit from an after school ELD class as opposed to a reading class. We can intervene and teach kids to decode all year but what good will it do them if they do not understand what they are reading? Every grade level came up with a pretty sizeable list. In addition, I asked the Title 1 teacher how many of her 78 students were either with her because a language barrier had led to

English reading difficulties in the first place or were not progressing with her because they were in situations like Ana's- stuck at a reading level they cannot pass until they learn more English. She came up with over 50% of her students in a situation like this. Everyone is required to do twenty minutes a day of ELD in their classrooms but as with my classroom, every teacher has such a discrepancy in abilities that it is hard to meet all their students' needs. They could increase the amount of ELD they do but what should they get rid of in its place-math? Science? Social Studies? There is no simple solution. Yes, there's sheltered subject matter instruction which hopefully, we all practice, but when 33% (and growing) of our school's population has Spanish as a first language, no to mention all the kids with other first languages, something more needs to be done. It seems we are not doing a very efficient job identifying students with real reading problems versus students with limited language issues. We have begun to consider that we may be targeting the wrong issue in our interventions but unfortunately, we are not the ones deciding where to intervene. We are going to continue compiling our list and then go to the administration with our idea of English language intervention.

I cannot say with any certainty that bilingual education would have made a difference for these students. I do find it notable however, that aside from the students in my class who have their extenuating circumstances (such as being moved all over or coming into the program late) the students who have gone through the bilingual program at our school from kindergarten through third grade, with signed waivers, even when the "program" only consisted of reading instruction, are doing fine and are on grade level with reading in English.

Conclusions

The most effective environments for academic achievement of ELL students have been hard to define. Numerous studies show successful achievements in high quality bilingual school settings. It is possible to bring our ELL's up to, or in some cases even beyond the skill levels of their native English speaking peers in our school systems. Unfortunately, many of the most effective programs are hard to replicate in new areas for a large variety of reasons, from lack of resources and barriers met in bureaucratic and legal guidelines, to a lack of correct information and understanding at the administrative and school levels. The complicated web of political interference and standards continues to constantly change the face of programs made available to students and as schools scramble to meet expectations and adjust to new parameters, ELL students are often lost in the shuffle.

Our school district has definitely fallen into the gaps left by misinterpretation and confusion surrounding proposition 227. My school exemplifies many of the confusing scenarios that often befall programs in the wake of political upheaval and seems to be a step behind in the process of adjusting successfully to new legal regulations. We are still struggling to find an appropriate balance between successful community awareness and inclusion and adherence to the law in our programs for ELL's. We no longer provide our bilingual students with all of the basics of successful bilingual programs. They are not given content matter instruction in their native language in order to keep them on grade level with their English- speaking peers. As teachers, we are not allowed to make professional decisions or recommendations regarding the best interests of our students. Parents are not always fairly informed and educated about the choices they have for their

children and are often deterred from seeking the information they need. Most unfortunate perhaps is the lack of support services and resources for those students in our program but unfortunately, in my opinion, this is reflective of many of the problems with our California schools in general.

In looking at our classes in light of the research, specific conclusions become clearer. My school has no supported guidelines or "program" for our limited but mandated bilingual program or Dual Language Immersion program. It also lacks many of the characteristics defined as essential for effective program design such as whole staff buy- in and education, and administrative support. However, there are some of these effective programs' critical components that are a central part of our school community as a whole such as high expectations for all students, including ELL's. We are improving with our community outreach efforts and some key people are starting to look for solutions in the arena of interventions for our struggling ELL's.

In much of the research, bilingual programs are being loosely defined, run incorrectly, and mislabeled. The research on reading achievement still consistently shows that teaching reading is more successful when done in the native language first. As for my classroom setting, it is apparent that my students' experiences show good evidence for the success of native language literacy instruction in the fostering of English language literacy for those children who have access to waivers and attend school consistently throughout the program. It appears that the program or lack of program we currently have is not doing specific damage in offering Spanish reading instruction because reading abilities transfer to English. The administrative decisions about

interventions must be reanalyzed. With such a changing population in our school, we must reach out to those who appear to be falling through the cracks.

As for the future of bilingual education at our school, the program could be very beneficial with some changes put in place. We need to revamp the interventions offered, we need comparable resources in Spanish as in English for language arts and more of an effort needs to be made at educating our whole staff on the needs of our ELL students and the theory behind bilingual education. We need a full time office staff person who speaks Spanish. If this happens, the education can then be more effectively disseminated to our parent population. If nothing else, we are successfully helping many of our LEP students transition to English within our program. I have some extremely bright students in my classroom who are very successful students and at the end of third grade are very ready to be just as successful in English only classrooms. Unfortunately, if we continue without making any more progress toward reorganizing, the real downfall of our program will be when the bilingual teachers get so frustrated by the battle for equal resources and administrative support that we walk away, leaving no one at our school site to offer the services of native language literacy instruction to anyone.

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